

USDA Amends Wheat Import Regulations By Removing Flag Smut Restrictions

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today announced it is amending the regulations regarding the importation of wheat and related articles by removing restrictions related to flag smut.

Based on the findings of a pest-risk assessment and a number of other considerations, APHIS has concluded that U.S. wheat will not be at risk if the restrictions on flag smut from affected countries are removed. Unlike other bunts and smuts of wheat, flag smut does not affect the quality of harvested grain for feed or flour and does not have a significant economic impact. APHIS will, however, continue to prohibit the importation of wheat and related articles from these affected countries until an evaluation can be completed to ensure that those articles do not pose a risk of introducing other wheat-related diseases of concern.

This action removes flag smut-related prohibitions that are no longer necessary while continuing to provide protection against other potential pests and diseases of wheat.

Flag smut is a plant disease caused by the fungus, *Urocystis agropyri*. It was first discovered in the United States in 1919, and a quarantine on wheat from countries with flag smut was put into effect. Until the 1930s, flag smut was a significant disease of wheat in the United States, but recently it has only been found in the Pacific Northwest on wheat seed sown between late August and early September.

The final rule was published in the Nov. 28 *Federal Register* and becomes effective Dec. 28. APHIS documents published in the *Federal Register* are available on the Internet, go to the Federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> and, in the Search for Open Regulation" box, select "Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service" from the agency drop-down menu, then click on "Submit." In the Docket ID column, select APHIS-2005-0046 to submit or view public comments and to view supporting and related materials available electronically.

Note to Stakeholders: Stakeholder announcements and other APHIS information are available on the Internet. Go to the APHIS home page at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov> and click on the "Newsroom" button. For more information regarding these regulatory changes, please contact Shirley Wager-Page at (301) 734-8453 or Shirley.A.Wager-Page@aphis.usda.gov.

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